

Eliciting the voices of children with disabilities

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Overview of presentation

➤ Introduction

- Sociology of childhood
- Important considerations when gathering information from children
- Participation of students with disabilities in school

➤ Interview study of Icelandic students and their school environment

- Description
- Results

➤ Implications for occupational therapy

Sociology of childhood

- Childhood is a social construction
- Children not seen as passive objects but as social actors in their own right
 - Important for us to know how they feel and what they do!
- Children seen as human beings and not human becomings

Client-centered practice

- Children with disabilities have important insights and suggestions about their situation and the services they receive
- Helping children articulate their opinions is an important factor in the promotion of their health and well-being
- The opportunity to make choices, express preferences, set goals and self-regulate behaviour linked to more favorable adult outcomes

Gathering information from children - important considerations

- Ethical aspects
- Considering the children's competencies
 - Make sure the child understands the questions
- Skills in apprehending the children's experiences
- Motivating children
 - Make sure the child feels comfortable and safe
 - Do not threat the child's image of self
- Formulating questions

What do we know about the participation of students with disabilities in schools?

- Less than the participation of typically developing children, depending on setting, occasion, and type of activity
- A large amount of literature, however...
 - Most studies report the views of parents and teachers
 - The children's voices are seldom elicited or heard
- Important to gather information from the children themselves

Environmental features can facilitate or hinder school participation



Purpose of study

- Investigate the student-environment fit of two groups
 - Students with physical limitations
 - Students with psychosocial limitations
- Look for differences and similarities between the student groups, in order to identify their need for adjustments

Study sample by gender, school location, grade level and disabling condition

Students with physical limitations		Students with psychosocial limitations	
Gender	N	Gender	N
Girls	20	Girls	15
Boys	20	Boys	21
School Location		School Location	
Capital area	25	Capital area	27
Suburban or rural areas	15	Suburban or rural areas	9
Grade-level		Grade-level	
Fourth-seventh grade	22	Fourth-seventh grade	21
Eight-tenth grade	12	Eight-tenth grade	11
High school	6	High school	4
Disabling condition/limitation		Disabling condition/limitation	
Cerebral Palsy (CP)	21	ADD/ADHD	13
Spina Bifida	7	Emotional/behavioural difficulties	12
Neuromuscular or musculoskeletal	12	Mood and eating disorders	⁹ 11

Instrument: The School Setting Interview (SSI)

- Developed to examine the level of student-environment fit of students with disabilities from age 9 and over
 - A high fit indicates a match between the attributes of the student and the environment. No adjustments needed
 - A low fit is characterized by students reporting unmet needs for adjustments
- Based on an interview with the student
- Contains 16 items that focus on everyday school activities
- Each item rated on a four-step scale

16 items focusing on various aspects of the school environment

Write	Do practical subjects
Read	Participate in the classroom
Speak	Participate in social activities during breaks
Remember things	Participate in practical activities at breaks
Do mathematics	Go on field trips
Do homework	Get assistance
Take exams	Access the school
Do sports activities	Interact with staff

Results

- Both groups of students required adjustments to many school settings
- Students with physical limitations required a more significant degree of adjustments to be made to their environments
- **But** these needs were more often satisfactorily met by the schools than were the needs of students with psychosocial limitations

Student-environment fit

Students with physical limitations (n=40)

- The students required adjustments in most school activities
 - Every child would benefit from some kind of adjustment.
 - Older students needed more adjustments than younger students
- The best fit (low number of needs for adjustments) was reported in the items:
 - *Interact with staff*
 - *Speak*
 - *Remember things*
- The least fit (high number of need for adjustments) was reported in the items
 - *Write*
 - *Do sports activities*
 - *Participate in the classroom*
 - *Go on field trips*

Student-environment fit

Students with psychosocial limitations (n=36)

- Many students reported a good fit
 - But reported the need for adjustments for most items.
 - Older students reported more needs for adjustments than younger students.
- The best student-environment fit was reported in
 - *Access the school*
 - *Interact with staff*
 - *Practical break activities*
- The least student-environment fit was reported in
 - *Do mathematics*
 - *Write*
 - *Do sports activities*

Comparison of the two student groups

- Students with physical limitations demonstrated significantly lower (p-value .05) student-environment fit than those with psychosocial limitations on the items:
 - *Do practical subjects*
 - *Participate in the classroom*
 - *Practical break activities*
 - *Go on field trips*
 - *Access the school*
- Students with psychosocial limitations demonstrated significantly lower (p-value .05) student-environment fit than those with physical limitations on:
 - *Speak*
 - *Remember things*

Key findings and concerns

- Students with physical and psychosocial limitations both report divergent as well as corresponding needs
- Older students need more adjustments than younger students
 - Increased awareness of performance limitations?
 - More stability and support in the lower grades?
- Occupational therapists should focus more explicitly on the needs of students with psychosocial limitations
- Appropriate adjustment and support needs to be developed within school for these students

Key findings and concerns, cont.

- The SSI is applicable to both groups, although originally designed for students with physical limitations
- Information about barriers to participation as perceived by the students
 - Will increase the likelihood that the occupational therapy intervention meets these needs
 - Will increase the likelihood that intervention will be properly targeted and successful.
 - Is a prerequisite for client-centred occupational therapy

Main message: Ask the child!

- Snæfridur: *Is there something that you would like to do differently at school?*
- Thora (11 years): *...If only I were allowed to use the computer more, I wouldn't need as much assistance in school. It is no fun having all these old ladies hanging around all the time*

References

- Egilson, S. og Hemmingsson, H. (2009). School participation of students with physical and psychosocial limitations: A comparison. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 72, 144-152.
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